

March 25, 2021

Oregon State Legislature Senate Committee on Health Care:

Chair - Senator Deb Patterson

Vice-Chair - Senator Tim Knopp

Senator James Manning, Jr.

Senator Lee Beyer

Senator Dallas Hurd

In Favor of SB772, Pay Parity for Naturopathic Physicians

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Health Care:

Thank you for your service on the Oregon Senate Health Care Committee.

I am writing to request your support in passing SB772, to require insurance pay parity for naturopathic physicians compared to other licensed physicians.

As you may know, naturopathic physicians - Doctors of Naturopathic Medicine (NDs) - are reimbursed at a lower rate than Doctors of Medicine (MDs) and Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine (DOs) for the *same* level of service. In 2016, NDs were reimbursed approximately **22-87% less** for a typical new patient visit and **22-85% less** for a typical return patient visit, depending on the insurer.¹ Obviously, this is grossly inequitable, especially when you consider that naturopathic physicians receive rigorous medical school training comparable to that of an MD or DO, have comparable expenses for being in independent practice, and provide a comparable level of primary care services within their scope of practice.

The reality is that naturopathic doctors are currently being discriminated against by health insurance payors. This economic marginalization of NDs compared to other types of health practitioners undermines the State of Oregon's express goal to increase access to primary care provided by Naturopathic Physicians (NDs).² Legislation is necessary to insure fair and equal reimbursements - **equal pay for equal work**, as was enacted for Oregon Nurse Practitioners and Oregon Physician Assistants in 2013 and 2016.³

¹ Oregon Health Authority data

² Oregon Health Policy Board's Healthcare Workforce Committee's 5-Year Strategic Plan for Primary Care Provider Recruitment in Oregon

³ HB2902 and SB1503B

The lack of fairness and equity in insurance reimbursements has negative real-life consequences for naturopathic doctors and the communities where they live and work. Examples of these negative impacts are:

1. NDs also have medical school debt to repay. A typical student loan debt for recent ND graduates is \$250,000, plus interest. Reduced reimbursements make it difficult to repay student loans and can have a devastating effect on an ND's financial situation, even forcing some to leave the profession. Others who remain in the profession experience the constraints and frustrations of an income grossly disproportionate to their level of education, hours worked and on-call, high level of responsibility, and the personal sacrifices made to become a physician and to be in practice.
2. NDs also have office overhead expenses to pay. The costs for office space, utilities, staff compensation, insurance, supplies, and other business expenses are comparable to those for an MD or DO in independent medical practice, yet the ability to pay for them is markedly impaired by reduced reimbursements. Consequently, many NDs cannot afford to have office staff and must do all their office work, limiting the time they have available to serve patients. When primary care doctors are unable to see more patients, this has a negative impact on our communities.
3. Pay inequality for NDs limits patient access to preventive and holistic care. Lowered reimbursements discourage new doctors from joining the profession, forces some NDs to limit their hours so they can work at a "second job," and causes others to leave the profession altogether. Oregon needs more primary care doctors, including ones who are experts in preventive and holistic care. Pay parity for NDs will help meet that need.

SB722 is about **equal pay for equal work, and correcting the injustice of reimbursement disparity**. All the dedicated naturopathic physicians who serve the people of our state deserve to be paid fairly, so we can continue to serve our communities and the patients who want and need access to our care.

As a hard-working doctor and small business person, I ask you to vote YES for SB722. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Liz Dickey

Liz Dickey, ND